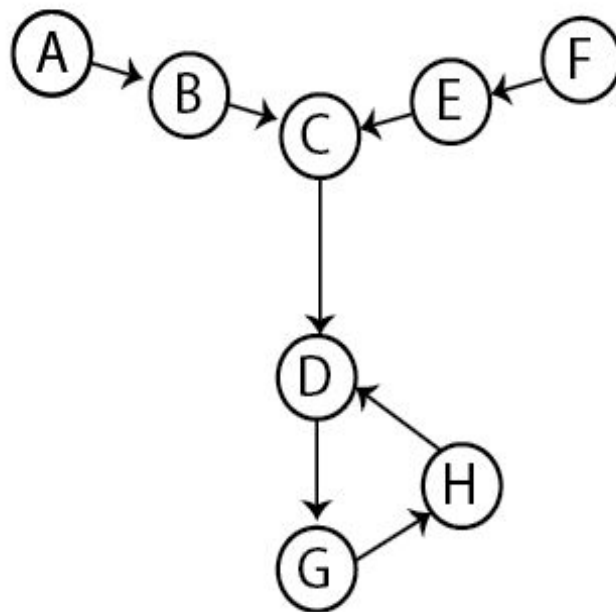


Flowscapes

Water Logic, abridged version

Edward de Bono
Caspar de Bono

deBono



Flowscapes

Water Logic, abridged version

Edward de Bono
Caspar de Bono

 deBono

Flowscapes

Water Logic, abridged version

Edward de Bono

Caspar de Bono

‘The mind can see only what it is prepared to see.

The analysis of data does not, by itself, produce ideas. The analysis of data can only allow us to select from existing ideas. Hypotheses, speculation, provocation and model building, allow us to see the world differently. The creation of these frameworks of possibility is a perceptual process.’

Dr Edward de Bono

Flowscapes

Water Logic, abridged version

Originally by Edward de Bono

Adapted by Caspar de Bono



2020

Copyright © 2020 Edward de Bono Ltd

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2020

eBook ISBN 978-1-4717-8585-6

Edward de Bono Ltd t/a de Bono.

Registered office: First Floor, Templeback, 10 Temple Back, Bristol, BS1 6FL.

Registered in England.

Registered number: 11433091.

<https://www.debono.com>

Email: info@debono.com

This book is dedicated to my father, Edward de Bono. It contains his ideas about understanding and changing perception. It provides a practical framework for managing your attention. I have created it as an abridged version of 'Water Logic', first published 1993. This book places an emphasis on the application of the flowscape technique. I hope you will use it to understand and change your perception.

Caspar de Bono

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: Water logic](#)

[Chapter 2: Flowscapes](#)

[Chapter 3: Concepts](#)

[Chapter 4: Attention flow](#)

[Chapter 5: Change your thinking](#)

[Chapter 6: Summary](#)

[Chapter 7: Example](#)

[Your flowscapes](#)

[Flowscape templates](#)

[References](#)

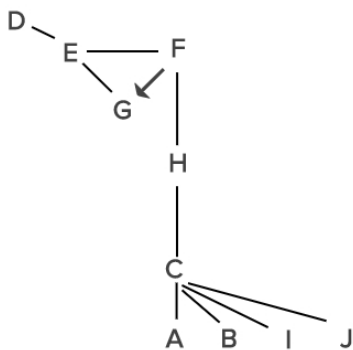
[de Bono](#)

Introduction

We are taught that sound logic will lead to better thinking and positive outcomes. However, logical reasoning is entirely dependent on the premise, in other words, how the situation is framed. Perception precedes logic. Conflict resolution, problem solving and our ability to create opportunities are dependent on understanding and changing perceptions.

Rock logic is the logic of critical thinking. It is linear and searches for truth. It is about being 'correct'. Unlike rock logic, perception is determined by the self-organising mechanism of the mind. It is nonlinear and is often 'incorrect'. Therefore, it requires a different description. Water logic is the logic of perception and precedes rock logic. Water logic is concerned with movement.

How can you visualise your thinking as clearly as you might view a landscape from an airplane? Flowscapes are designed to draw attention to the shape of your perception. They prompt you to notice how your thinking is influenced. An exploration of your perception reveals new ways to improve your thinking and the situations that your thinking influences.



The purpose of drawing a flowscape is to look at it. You should be able to look at a flowscape in the same way that a geographer,

farmer or developer looks at a landscape. Flowscapes allow you to note, to comment, to identify points of interest or significance, to recognise areas that require action and decide where attention is best focused.

We create a flowscape to understand our perception. This is a preliminary and separate step to analysis and problem-solving. It is a map of attention. Once the flowscape has been created, it serves as a reference for where to focus and change thinking. If you are impatient and set out to use the flowscape as a one-stage problem-solving tool, you will not reflect your perception of the situation but only what you wish to do. You risk imposing an expected or 'correct' narrative onto the situation, rather than your underlying perceptions.

There are two distinct stages when using a flowscape. The first is to map your perception and the second is to use that map as a reference to change your thinking. This book will lead you through both stages.

Chapter 1: Water logic

Johnny was a young boy who lived in Australia. One day, his friends offered him a choice between a one-dollar coin and a two-dollar coin. In Australia, the one-dollar coin is considerably larger than the two-dollar coin. Johnny took the one-dollar coin. His friends laughed and claimed Johnny was stupid because he did not yet know that the smaller coin was worth twice as much as the bigger coin. Whenever they were bored, they would repeat the exercise. Johnny never seemed to learn.

One day, a bystander felt sorry for Johnny and explained that the smaller coin was worth twice as much as the larger coin.

Johnny listened politely. He then said, 'Yes, I do know that. But how many times would they have offered me the coins if I had taken the two-dollar coin the first time?'

A computer programmed to evaluate this situation would determine which of the two coins 'is' the most valuable. It would therefore select the smaller, two-dollar coin. Johnny's thinking was not based on *what 'is'* but on *where 'to'*. In other words, 'What will this lead to?' 'What will happen if I take the one-dollar coin?' Traditional rock logic is based on 'is'. It is the logic of analysis and categorisation. The logic of perception, or water logic, is based on 'to'.

Rock logic is the critical search for 'truth'. It is comprised of argument and adversarial exploration. These thinking habits can be traced back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. After the Dark Ages, the rediscovery of this classical thinking was a breath of fresh air. These methods were used by the Catholic Church to provide a weapon against heresy and by humanist thinkers to provide an escape from church dogma. So, this became the established thinking of Western civilisation.

Traditional Western thinking sought to move away from the vagueness and instability of perception and to establish certainty and consistency. This has been done reasonably well. Yet, if our

perceptions are faulty, then processing those faulty perceptions perfectly can only give answers that are wrong. Sometimes these answers are even dangerous. For example, both sides in any war, conflict or disagreement always have 'logic' on their side. While this is true, it is a logic that serves their perception. This book is about the water logic of perception.

Perception can be defined as the way the brain organises information received from the outside world via the senses. The inner world of the mind is different from the outside world that surrounds us. Traditionally, Western culture has tried to move away from perception and reach the 'truth' of reality. Yet, perception is just as real. A child's terror at a moving curtain in the night is very real. Individual perceptions are unique and may only overlap in part with the external world.

It is no wonder that ancient thinkers considered it a magnificent feat to move away from the highly subjective notions of perception towards truths and absolutes. These ideas could be checked and would hold true for everyone.

When making a table, you could guess the sizes of the required pieces and simply cut them up. However, it would be more effective to measure the required pieces. If measured, they would be more likely to fit together, and the table legs would be the same height. Measurement is a mechanism for consistency. We take it for granted but it is a wonderful concept. Mathematics is another method for managing information. Through mathematics, we translate the world into symbols and relationships. Once this is done, we enter the 'closed universe' of mathematics with its own rules. We play by those rules rigorously. Then, we translate the result back into the real world. This method works well provided the mathematics are appropriate and the translation is valid. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle set out to apply this method to language. Words were to have specific definitions and become as real, concrete and objective as measurements. In addition, there was to be a rigorous game with rules to tell us how to put words together and how to reason. This game was largely based on the identity of an object. An object either

'is' or 'is not' something else. The principle of contradiction states that something cannot 'be' and 'not be' simultaneously. From this principle, Western systems of language, logic, argument and critical thinking were developed.

The result is that we make judgements. Through these judgements, we arrive at truths and certainties. This is a very attractive and often very successful way of thinking. It seems successful when applied to human affairs as judgement and certainty provide a basis for action and for righteousness. Yet, this method is a belief system. You see the world as you expect it to be.

Rock is hard, unchanging and unyielding. The shape of a rock is definite. Water is gentler. Water is soft and yielding.

If you place a rock on a surface, it will remain there. A rock 'is'. If you pour water onto a flat surface, it spreads and 'explores'. If there is even the slightest incline, the water will flow.

If you have a lump of rock in a cup and tilt it, the rock will eventually fall out. The rock is either in the cup or out of the cup. If you performed the same action with water, some would pour out of the cup while some would remain. It does not have to be either/or.

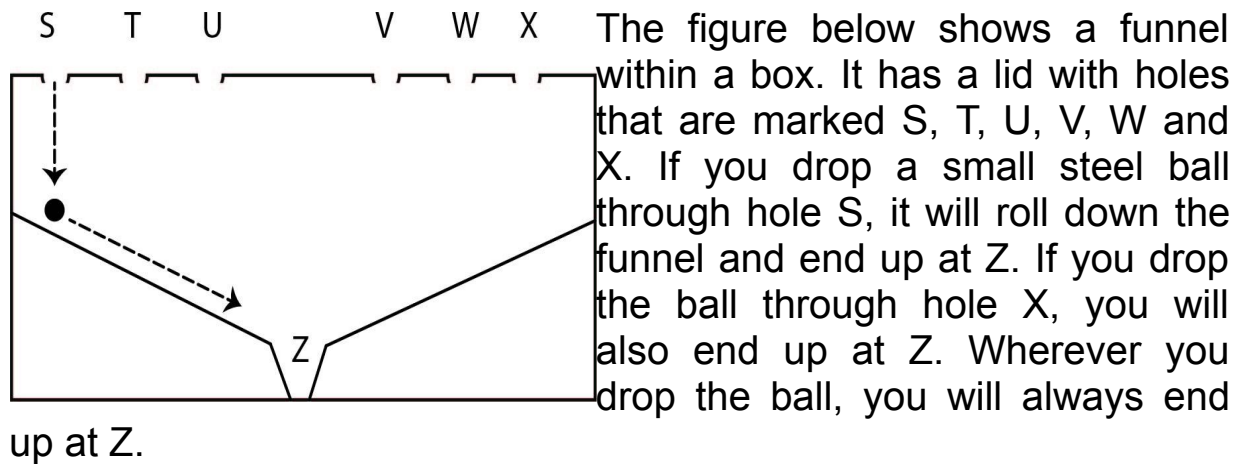
Rock logic is based on identity. For example, 'This is a caterpillar'. It is also based on 'have' and 'inclusion'. For example, 'This caterpillar is green and has a hairy body'. Inclusion, exclusion, identity, non-identity and contradiction are the stuff of reasoning. We create boxes in the forms of categories, classifications and words. We then judge whether something belongs in a certain box.

The mind is paradoxical in that it is good at recognising things and yet poor at noticing things. We can recognise a picture from a small fraction or a musical piece from a single bar. It can be said that we notice the things we are prepared to notice. At the same time, unusual things catch our attention. Anything in between is unlikely to be noticed. This is a good design that allows our minds to make sense of a busy world.

A finger on a trigger can release a child's pop gun. Or, it can release a nuclear bomb. There is no direct relationship between the pressure on the trigger and the effect. A system is set 'to go' and you trigger it to go. Our memories are expectations. The stimulation we receive from the world around us triggers expected patterns in the brain. This is comparable to the way a child connects the dots in an activity book. Our perception is predetermined by experience.

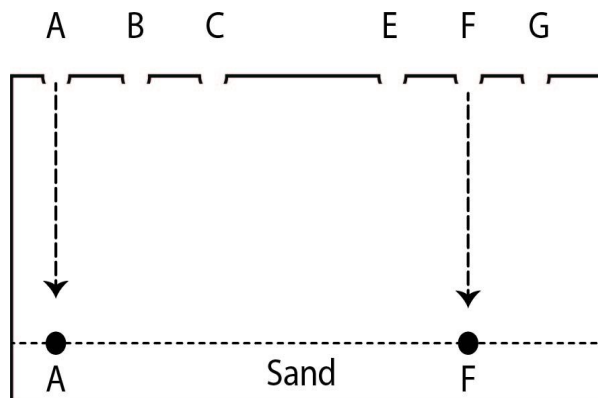
Attention flow is determined by the outer world and by perception. Just as the leaves of a tree 'flow' down the branches into the tree trunk, the sensations we experience are 'drained' into an established flow pattern.

Chapter 2: Flowscapes

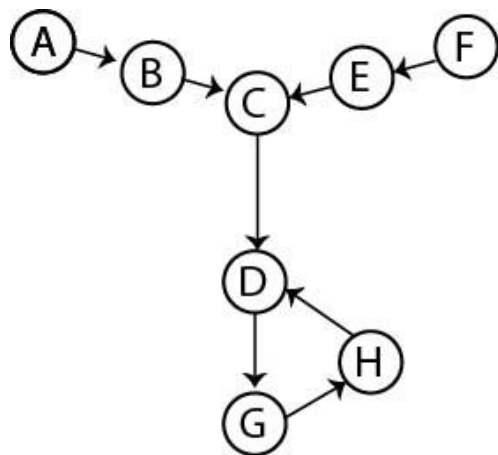


If you did not know about the funnel, you would regard this as very strange behaviour. This is how perceptions are formed and why they are stable. An input may occur in a variety of forms but will eventually settle or stabilise in a single form. That is the perception we recognise and use. All the others are unstable and intermediate.

We expect information systems to record exactly what we have put into them. This is shown below where the funnel has been replaced by a tray of sand. In this system, an input of A is recorded as A and an input of F is recorded as F. This is comparable to a camera that records what is in front of it.



The funnel system is an 'active' system that can shift information. This contrasts to the 'passive' system that records what is presented. The funnel system of nerve activity, illustrated by the flowscape



below, behaves like the funnel. Any input will always end up in the stable state of D-G-H

There is, of course, no need for the arms of the funnel to be sloping as gravity is not involved. It was drawn this way to make the funnel analogy easier to conceptualise.

RECOGNITION

Once the stable pattern is established in terms of pathway preferences, any similar input will be recognised. The object to be recognised does not have to be exactly the same or in the same position as before. The input will now follow the established pattern.

CENTRING

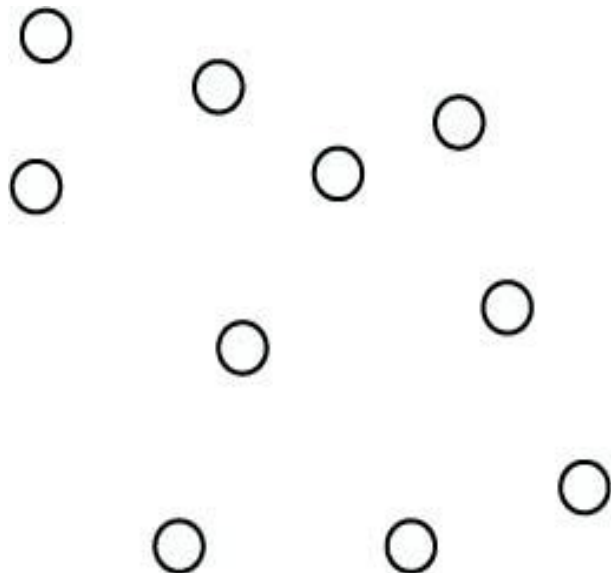
We can recognise the 'pure' or 'ideal' image for any object. For instance, we might visualise a garden chair, an office chair, an armchair etc. while maintaining an awareness of a generic chair. In abstract matters, centring refers to how we are drawn towards the pure or classic example. We have now reached Plato's ideals. He maintained that such ideals must pre-exist for us to recognise things. The behaviour of a self-organising system demonstrates how these ideals are formed by our minds.

PREPAREDNESS

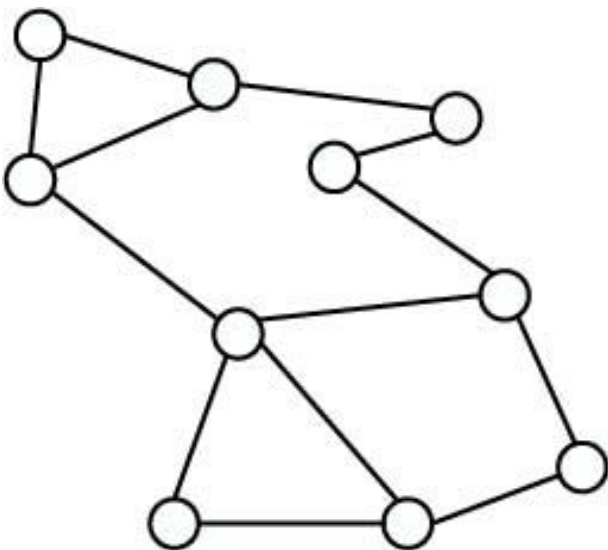
The mind can only see what it is prepared to see. This is now widely accepted. That is why there is such a need for hypotheses, speculation and provocation when examining data. Without new 'frameworks', we would only be able to see data in old ways.

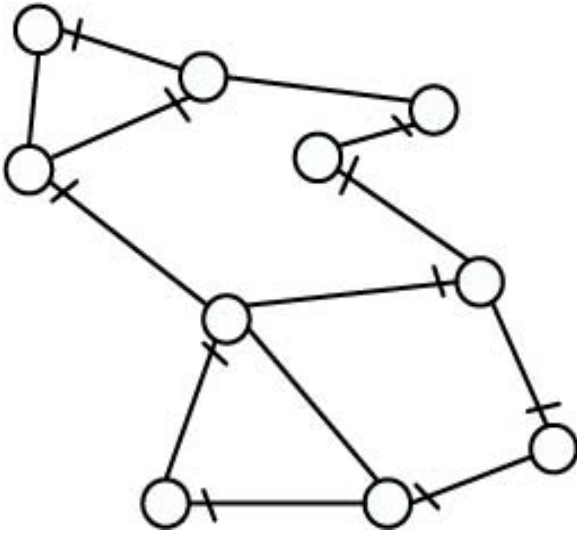
The following exercise will demonstrate how perception can settle into stable patterns.

Draw a random arrangement of ten similarly sized circles.



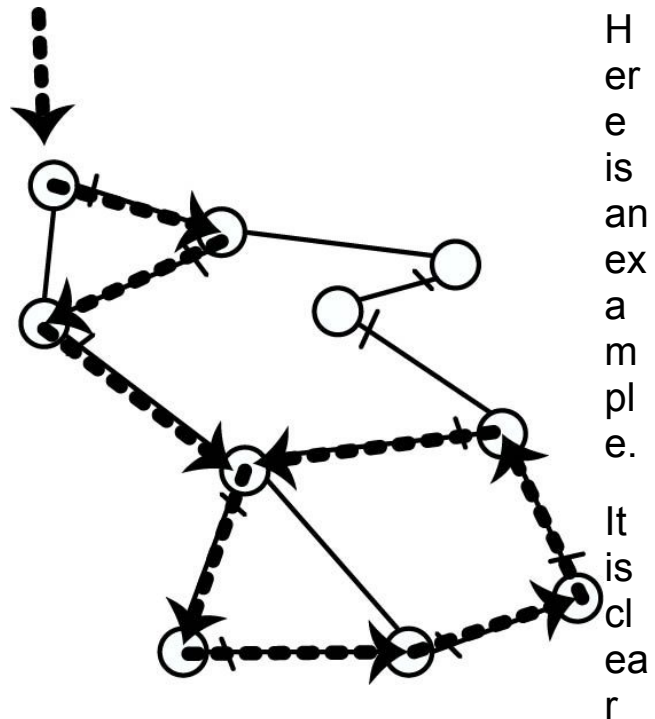
Connect each circle randomly with at least two lines.





Make a mark on only one line where it leaves each circle. These marked lines represent the preferred path.

Then, take a pencil and follow the preferred path. You can enter the system from any circle. When you enter a circle using a path line, you must exit from another path line.



Here is an example. It is clearer

there is a stable repeating loop and that all other states feed into this loop.

This self-organising process explains how the brain forms stable perceptions from the chaos of the world around. The way the brain is organised makes it inevitable that stable perceptions will form whatever the input. Once perception flows have formed, they shape the way we see the world.

CREATING A FLOWSCAPE

Step 1: Decide on the topic or situation that you wish to think about. For example, suppose it is late in the evening and your neighbour is playing music too loudly.

Step 2: Write a 'stream of consciousness' list with each point on a separate line. A stream of consciousness implies aspects, ideas, items, features and factors that occur to you. This is not a systematic analysis and does not need to be comprehensive. It is called a 'stream of consciousness' to indicate the ideas that occur to you as you consider the situation. A genuine stream of consciousness list contains any aspect of the situation rather than solutions. There would be no point in carefully choosing the points in order to demonstrate a result.

Step 3: Go through the list and give each item a letter. For example, A, B, C, D, etc.

Step 4: Go through the list and connect each item with another. This is not a matter of cause and effect but rather what comes to mind next. Some items may receive multiple inputs, but each letter should only have a single arrow flowing to another.

In the case of the neighbour's loud music, the stream of consciousness list may look like this:

LOUD MUSIC

PERSISTENT

CANNOT SLEEP

NO RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS

NEIGHBOUR IS DISMISSIVE

THREATS DO NOT WORK

AGGRESSIVE NEIGHBOUR

NO ONE ELSE IS AFFECTED

GOING ON FOR A LONG TIME

IMPOSSIBLE TO BLOCK OUT

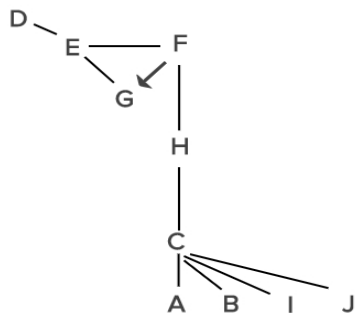
The connections may look like this:

A	Loud music	>> C
B	Persistent	>> C
C	Cannot sleep	>> H
D	No response to complaints	>> E
E	Neighbour is dismissive	>> F
F	Threats don't work	>> G
G	Aggressive Neighbour	>> E
H	No one else is affected	>> F

I	Going on for a long time	>> C
J	Impossible to block out	>> C

Step 5: Create the flowscape using the letters to represent the items. For example, if A, LOUD NOISE, flows to C, CANNOT SLEEP, then indicate that A flows to C. This should be carried out for all points. This process allows us to see which items are listed most often on the right-hand side (as destinations). In this example, C is listed many times.

Write the most used destination near the centre and see which items flow to that destination.



The first flowscape may look messy. If so, redraw it so that the arrows do not cross each other.

Page 78 contains a summary of the steps required to create and use a flowscape.

EXAMINING THE FLOWSCAPE

Now that we have the flowscape, we can examine it, decide where to focus our attention and how we may change our thinking.

COLLECTORS

These are points that seem to link with many other points. They are often concepts or abstract descriptions of ideas

In the noisy neighbour example, the collector is item C, CANNOT SLEEP. This is the central item and the key cause of the problem. Various other points flow into this including LOUD NOISE, PERSISTENT, GOING ON FOR A LONG TIME and IMPOSSIBLE TO BLOCK OUT MUSIC. At this point, you may think taking a sleeping pill would solve the problem. Or, a less drastic measure would be to use earmuffs. Collector points dominate thinking. They are possible action points and areas to challenge your thinking later.

STABLE LOOPS

Every flowscape contains at least one stable loop.

In the noisy neighbour example, the stable loop is represented by F-G-E. This gives stability to the perception. The loop indicates the neighbour is aggressive, dismissive and unimpressed by threats. It is also the key area for action. Each point in the loop can be examined. If the neighbour is dismissive, E, then perhaps legal action could be pursued as this would be more difficult to dismiss. On the other hand, the aggressiveness of the neighbour, G, may be softened by a different approach. Perhaps the first approach of complaining caused the aggression. Or, as threats have not worked, F, you may try reciprocating by playing your own music as loudly.

LINKS

In the noisy neighbour example, H is a vital link between the collector point and the stable state. Therefore, H should be examined more closely. This indicates that one point of weakness is that no one else is involved. There cannot be a pressure group or multiple complaints. Perhaps something could be done about this. For example, a neighbourhood association could be set up. This association could then deal with all neighbourhood complaints. The neighbour in question may become a member of the neighbourhood

association and would have to explain why their music needed to be so loud. If they did not become a member, the association could put pressure on them to play their music more quietly.

Do not be concerned about whether your list is comprehensive enough or whether you have made the 'right' connections. This does not matter. The flowscape is a picture of your perceptions. There could be other pictures just as walking around a house can offer different perspectives. In addition, your perceptions may be different under different circumstances. Water logic is not a matter of being right but of flow. Proceed with the flowscape without worrying about getting the inputs and connections right. It is right if it is useful.

Remember that the flowscape describes perception. It is never about having to prove something or offer evidence for a relationship like an analysis of the outside world does. If a relationship exists in a perception, then it exists. It may be faulty or unjustified but that is irrelevant. Once we can see the flowscape, we can challenge or attempt to alter a relationship.

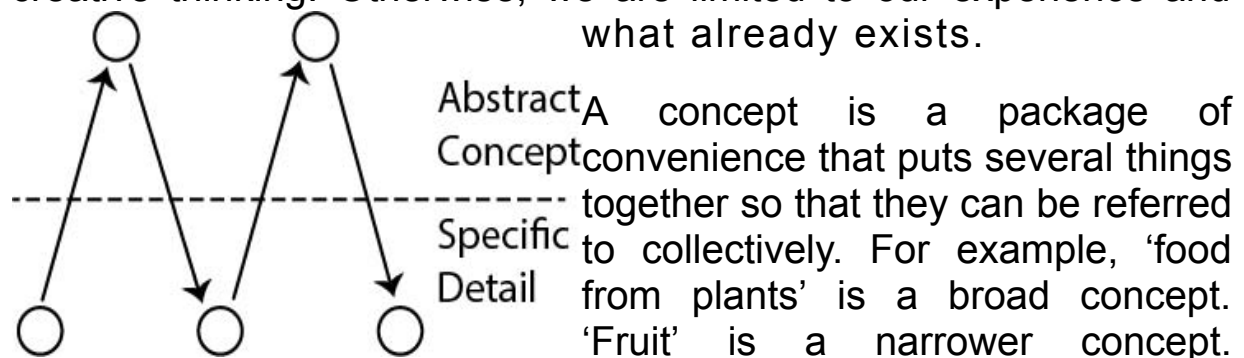
Flowscapes are not about objective analysis. Some perceptions are wise and justified. Some perceptions are inadequate and biased. In a flowscape, the objective is to see perceptions as they are, not what we would like them to be. It may seem messy and vague to bundle things like constraints and objectives together. However, that is what perception is like.

The brain does not contain neatly labelled boxes. That is why we write stream of consciousness lists. Perception itself is never comprehensive. We look at things from one perspective. Our attention flows over certain features while missing others.

Chapter 3: Concepts

Once, there was a classic experiment in which students were given electrical components and asked to create a circuit that would ring a bell. However, there was not enough wire to complete the circuit. Most students gave up and declared the task impossible. A small number of students used the metal shaft in the screwdriver they were given to complete the circuit. Most students looked for wire, but the most exceptional students worked at a concept level. They looked for a conductor.

The ability to work at a concept level is crucial for creativity and for thinking in general. As shown in the figure below, we need to move between specific details and abstract concepts. This is how we use a single idea to generate multiple ideas. It is a key mechanism of creative thinking. Otherwise, we are limited to our experience and what already exists.



Specific fruits include oranges, lemons and apples. Yet, 'apple' is also a concept at a narrower level as there are many varieties of apples. There is no correct level of abstraction or specificity. What matters is whether you are able to establish flow in your thinking and whether you can use the concept to move on.

Concepts give us flexibility and movement in thinking. These concepts do not need to be precise. A little fuzziness may even be beneficial.

When creating a flowscape, the base list contains thoughts at the abstract level and the specific level. If you have a mixture of

concepts and specific items, you will find that the concepts often end up as collector points.

If you find it easy to create the base list and you have too many items, it is possible you are working at a level that is too specific (like the oranges, lemons and apples). If this is the case, write down all the items you wish, no matter how long the list becomes. Then, look at the list and try to reduce it down until it becomes manageable. This can be achieved by combining different items together under a common concept.

The base list must contain concepts that are broad enough to cover many details but not so broad that they repeat the initial question. In a flowscape on choosing a holiday, if we use the concept ENJOYABLE, we may end up showing that the best way to choose a holiday is to choose an enjoyable one. More narrower concepts are needed including what sort of situations are enjoyable.

In addition to using concepts for the base list, we can also extract concepts from the flowscape when complete. Any major collector point is automatically a useful concept. However, it may not be adequately described by the items in the base list.

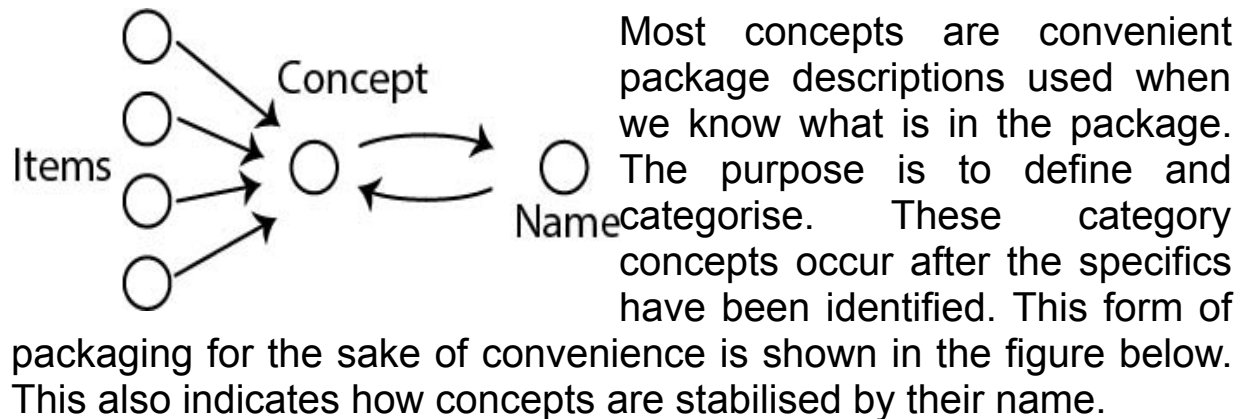
Sometimes a whole loop represents a concept.

The flowscape is a map of our perceptions. A map of the inner world. This may correspond to the outer world or it may not. Usually, it corresponds in some parts but not in others. When we seek to change the flowscape, are we seeking to change the inner world or the outer world? Are we trying to improve our perceptions or to solve problems? Both are possible. The flowscape allows us to see what points may allow us to change our perception of the outer world. Alternatively, we may have imagined a change in how we see the world that we can apply to the outer world.

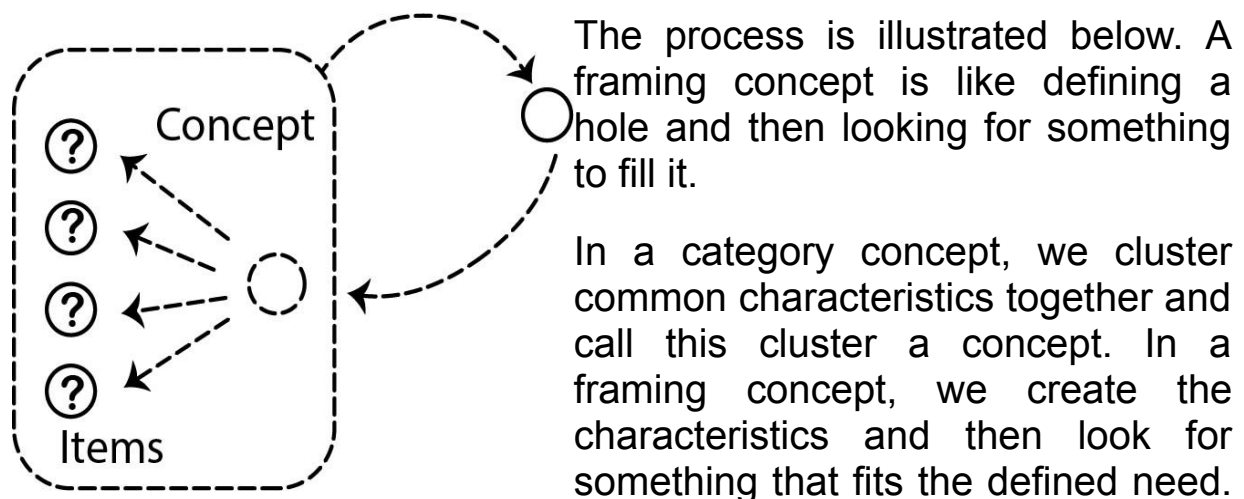
Our perceptions are the basis of our behaviour in the outer world. It could even be argued that inner reality is more important than outer reality as inner reality and perception determine how we see the outer world, how we act and how we react.

Rock logic sought to escape the subjectivity of perception. Water logic seeks to explore and use the subjectivity of perception.

CATEGORY AND FRAMING -CONCEPTS



However, sometimes, we start with a concept as an abstract frame and do not yet know what the specifics are. Writers know this well as they often search for the right words to describe a complex set of features. An engineer may say, 'At this point, we need something that is going to change shape and form a shape that we have predetermined'.



This is an important part of problem solving. A framing concept is like a hypothesis as it allows us to move forward from where we are now.

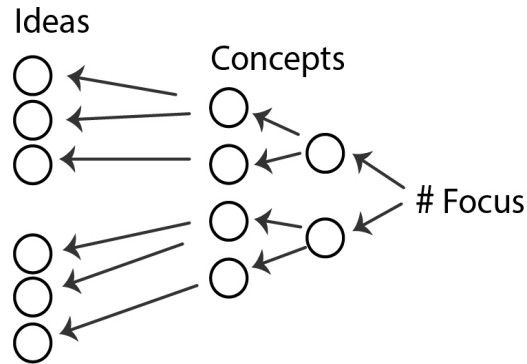
THE CONCEPT FAN

The Concept Fan is a technique that uses concepts to breed specifics. Suppose the purpose of our thinking is to tackle the problem of traffic congestion in cities. From this defined purpose, we can look for broad concepts that may help. For example, we may seek to reduce the volume of traffic to improve flows on existing road systems. Or, we may increase the available road surface. Both are broad concepts.

How might we feed these broad concepts with narrower concepts? This is the same notion as the feeding of a collector point. How might we reduce traffic? We could encourage the use of vehicles that can carry more people. We could discourage drivers from coming into the city. We could reduce the need for people to come into the city. Of course, there are many other concepts that can feed the broad concept of reducing traffic. We would perform the same action for each broad concept thought of.

Next, we consider how to feed these concepts with specific ideas. In practice, this means seeing how concepts could be practically carried out. For example, how might we obtain vehicles with more people on board? We could encourage the use of public transport, improve public transport services, encourage carpooling, create privilege lanes for vehicles with several occupants or restrict parking in the city centre.

We would then perform the same action for each concept. How might we discourage people from driving into the city? We could charge an entrance fee before ten in the morning (as in Singapore), make no provision for parking, crack down on illegal parking, publicise pollution levels for the city or publicise the rate of car movement in the city.



The idea generation process is shown below. We move from the focus on the right-hand side through to the ideas on left-hand side via the concepts in the middle.

This process can become very powerful if you are flexible when working with concepts. This requires some practice. The concept fan is not an analysis of the situation. It is a type of flowscape.

At times, you may create a framing-concept but have no way of achieving your goal. For example, you may seek to discourage drivers by damaging their cars. Is it possible to find a way of doing this that would be effective and acceptable?

CONCEPTS AND FLOWCAPES

Concepts are a very important part of water logic. Concepts are collector points or junctions. They allow things to come together. Concepts enable us to move from idea to idea. Through concepts, we can categorise things but also to create things via framing concepts. The better you become at using concepts, the better you will be at water logic. The question is always, 'Where does this take us?' rather than, 'What is this?'

CONTEXT

In water logic, context is hugely important. A landscape or river valley is a useful analogy to represent the flow patterns that form in the self-organising information system we call the brain. This analogy provides a model with one major defect. The landscape is fixed and permanent but, in the brain, a change of context can

change the landscape. After this change, it is as if a different landscape were being observed.

It is characteristic of rock logic to ignore this and to assume that the absolutes of truth are independent of the current context.

The flowscape method deals with the inner world of perception. A flowscape is not a description of the outer world. Whenever a flowscape is constructed, the person laying out the stream of consciousness list and making the flow connections has a definite context in mind. During this moment, the context is fixed. If that person wishes to change the context, then a different flowscape can be laid out. At a different time, a new flowscape could be created and may differ from the original one as the context has changed.

When you take a picture, the photograph tells you what was there at that moment. The photograph does not tell you what it would be like if the sun were to come out, if the man were thinner, if the boy were to smile, if the woman wore a green dress, etc. In the same way, the flowscape is a snapshot of perception at any one moment. Where there is an interest in another 'if' or a possible context change, complete another flowscape.

Chapter 4: Attention flow

The flowscape begins with the stream of consciousness or base list. Flow connections are made for each item on the base list. The result is displayed graphically so that we can see the shape of our perceptions.

The purpose of the flowscape is to help you understand your perception and to determine where you might change your thinking.

Flowscales are devices to direct our attention. Examining a flowscape can direct our attention towards the significant aspects of our own perception.

Perceptions are highly individual. There is no sense in saying one flowscape is right or wrong. The flowscape is a hypothesis that we view in order to examine our perceptions. From such an examination, we may come to see the collector points that draw other points towards them. Such collector points tend to dominate perceptions. Then, there are the loops that stabilise perceptions.

We may gain an understanding of our perception and even insights into the situation at hand. Eventually, we may come to realise that some points are more important, and others are less important.

One of the main benefits of examining flowscales is to realise the commonality between certain factors. For convenience, we may wish to create a concept to represent a given cluster. We can agree with them or disagree with them. We may gain insights, a sense of relative importance and identify dominant factors. We may observe how the perceptions can be changed. We may come up with ideas of how to act in the outer world from our flowscape of the inner world.

Could we end up fooling ourselves? The answer is yes. Nevertheless, we have a much better chance of detecting self-deception with a flowscape than without it.

When using the flowscape technique, what difficulties are there likely to be?

TROUBLE WITH THE BASE LIST

The first difficulty is likely to be an inadequate base list. This may truly be inadequate, or you may just think it is. You may feel that there is something inexact about a stream of consciousness list as this is very different from a careful analysis. There is no need to think this way.

Your base list may indeed be inadequate in the sense that you have too many details and too few concepts. Concepts are powerful because they cover many things. If you tend to have too many details, go through the list and attempt to consolidate details with broader concepts.

It takes practice to create a useful base list. It is like the practice required to ride a bicycle. It is awkward rather than difficult but if you persevere, you will suddenly get the knack of it.

Our actions arise from our perceptions. Through these, we manage to initiate and then carryout sensible actions. Perceptions are changeable but are also stable enough to provide us with actions and flowscapes. If you were asked to arrange the numbers 3, 5, 2, 4, 1 and 6 from the smallest to the largest, you would have little difficulty in writing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. If you were asked to arrange the numbers 2, 13, 8, 20, 3 and 9 from the smallest to the largest, you would not think this was impossible simply because some numbers are missing. You would arrange them as: 2, 3, 8, 9, 13 and 20. In the same way, a flowscape does not have to be comprehensive to have value. We arrange what we have and then see what we get.

TROUBLE WITH CONNECTIONS

The next possible difficulty is in setting up flow connections between the points on the base list. This can be quite difficult as our minds are more familiar with cause and effect than flow. There are two

common types of difficulty at this stage. Either an item on the base list does not flow into any other item on the list. Or, there are so many possible connections for an item it becomes difficult to select only one.

Which of the points comes naturally to mind after this one? In what area does this point belong? Is there another point in this area? What follows on from this point? Is there a missing link point that would make the connection easier?

If you still have serious doubts, try creating two or more flowscapes with your different perceptions.

TROUBLE WITH ACCURACY

If flow and water logic are so heavily dependent on context and if context is so varied, how can a flowscape ever be accurate or have a value?

Accuracy is a rock logic term. Is the flowscape an accurate reflection of its creator's perception? If the person writes what they believe they ought to think, that is the picture that will emerge. If it is made honestly, it will reflect its creator's perception.

Flowscapes do not have a proving value as rock logic does. Their value is illustrative and suggestive. A flowscape provides a framework or hypothesis for looking at the world. A flowscape provides a tangible way of working on our perceptions.

Do not set out to construct a 'correct' flowscape. Write the stream of consciousness list and then work forwards to see what emerges.

Can there be misleading errors in a flowscape? As a flowscape does not claim to be right, it is difficult for it to be wrong. A flowscape is a hypothesis or a suggestion. It is a provisional way of looking at the shape of our perceptions. If we do not like what we see, we can establish what it is that we do not like. When we get a surprise, we may find it is the surprise of insight. For example, 'I did not realise that point was as central as it is'.

As most of the attention is on collector points and stable loops, there is the danger that an important point that just happens to feed into a collector point will not get the attention it deserves. In a way, this is as it should be as collector points and loops dominate perception. We usually believe that important points should dominate perception but often they do not. A flowscape is a picture of perception as it is, not as it should be.

There is also the danger of constructing a false flowscape. This is the sort that is carefully contrived to give you the perception you think you ought to have. In such cases, you are cheating yourself. There is no limit to the number of flowscapes you can lay out for any subject. You may vary the context and make another flowscape. You can alter some of the items on the base list and make a further flowscape. Examine these options and see where they can lead you.

THIRD PERSON

In an argument, people with opposing perceptions are often both right. Each opposing perception is based on a set of circumstances and context.

You can imagine how someone else's flowscape might look but recognise that this is speculative. If setting out a flowscape for someone else involves so much guesswork, is it worth doing?

A hypothesis is a reasonable guess that proves very useful by allowing us to devise tests for the hypothesis. In the same way, the guessed flowscape allows us to see which points need focusing on. A guess does not prove anything but does tell us where to look for proof. In negotiating, bargaining and conflict resolution, each party is trying to figure out what the other party is thinking. This is usually done gradually. The flowscape is a way of putting everything together so that we can see the shape of the other party's thinking. Politicians, advertisers and market analysts assess the perceptions of the public. Polls give them a good indication of these perceptions. Using these, key questions can be conceptualised and then asked. A flowscape can help to determine what the key questions may be.

A flowscape you create for someone else is unlikely to represent their thinking accurately. At the very least, it will help you understand how **you** perceive their thinking, which may be more useful.

If possible, verify your assumptions about the other person's perception. If not, design strategies to fit various possibilities. Alternatively, you could accept the risk that you may have got it wrong and go ahead with your strategy. However, you must be prepared to change the strategy if it does not seem to work.

Chapter 5: Change your thinking

Laying out a flowscape leads to insight and a greater understanding of our perceptions. The element with the greatest number of connections is the dominating idea. The dominating idea holds your attention and is strongly associated with the other elements that surround it. There is also at least one element loop which may dominate your thinking. These dominating ideas and loops can often be described abstractly to represent the concept behind the idea.

It is concepts that give movement and flexibility to thinking. Such concepts do not always need to be precise as they use water logic rather than rock logic. If we do not develop a facility for dealing with concepts, then we cannot progress beyond the literal details of experience.

CONCEPT EXTRACTION

Having observed your thinking in the flowscape, you can change it. Focus your attention on a dominating idea or loop and ask yourself what the concepts are. Are there other ways to achieve these concepts? This is called concept extraction. Here is an example:

Imagine you are asked to think of all the ways to remove water from a glass.

A pipe or straw could be used to suck the water out. The straw is a specific idea, the concept behind a straw is using *a difference in pressure to move liquid*. Using a syringe would be another idea that stems from the same concept.

A sponge is a specific idea that uses the concept of *absorption*, as is a towel.

Adding sand to the glass is an example of *displacement*, as are adding denser liquids or inflating a balloon in the glass.

You could heat the glass and the water would evaporate. This idea links to the concept of *change of state*. Freezing the glass with a spoon in the water would eventually allow you to lift the ice out when it begins to thaw.

In this respect, concepts are steppingstones to ideas and vice versa. The act of stepping between ideas and concepts generates alternatives.

Ask yourself if there are concepts missing from your flowscape that could be effective alternatives to the concepts you have described.

Chapter 6: Summary

Traditional rock logic is based on 'is', 'identity', 'truth', 'contradiction' and 'logic'. Mathematics uses the 'equals' sign to operate the rules of the mathematical universe. Water logic is based on 'to' and the concept of 'flow'. In certain, systems flow leads to 'stable loops'. A stable loop is not the same as 'truth'. It is simply one person's perception of reality.

The given context affects the flowscape. As such, it becomes a snapshot of the perception held by its creator during the time it was created. Most disagreements are really based on differences of context. However, we usually direct our thinking to arguing about differences of 'truth'.

Attention flow is partly determined by what is out there, partly by the perceptual patterns of our inner world and partly by developed attention-directing patterns. There is a close connection between perceptual patterns and attention flow. The world outside triggers the patterns that we then use to 'see' the world.

A flowscape allows us to map the flow patterns of our perception. Through this, we can see the shape of our thinking.

The dominance of rock logic makes some people uncomfortable with this book. At the same time, many people will welcome the fluidity of water logic. Such people may have always felt that rock logic is inadequate to deal with perceptions. Perception sets the scene for thinking.

Chapter 7: Example

Here is a worked example on a topic discussed in the Financial Times on the 27th of December 2019. It is titled 'Retailers grapple with \$100bn returns problem'. It was reported that in the USA alone, approximately \$100bn worth of goods purchased online between Thanksgiving and New Year 2019 were likely to be returned. Of these goods, approximately two-million tonnes were likely to be sent to landfills. Online purchases are three times more likely to be returned than purchases from physical stores. Clothing is the most likely item to be returned.

This represents an enormous economic and environmental waste. The next three pages show a stream of consciousness list, a flowscape followed by observations and ideas. Remember, a flowscape is a representation of one person's perception of a situation. It is neither right nor wrong.

Flowscape example

Topic: \$100bn returns problem

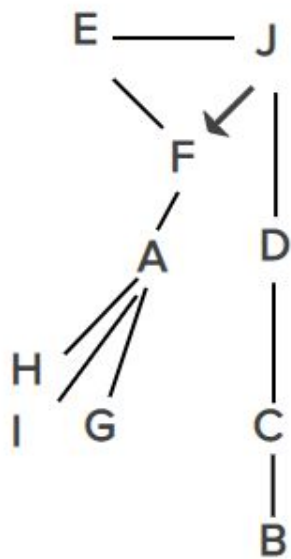
A	Try on at home	>> F
B	Long delays	>> C
C	Checking returns	>> D
D	Sold at a discount	>> J
E	Landfill	>> J
F	Competing on returns policy	>> E
G	Fee for returns	>> A
H	Inconsistent sizing	>> A
I	People cheat	>> A
J	Competing for sales	>> F

Flowscape example

Topic: \$100bn returns problem

The dominant idea is A: Try on at home. The dominant loop is JFE: Wasteful competition for sales via the returns policy.

‘Try on at home’ is the dominating idea as it has the greatest number of connections. Thinking about this, and the elements it connects



with, leads to other possibilities. The FT article commented that there is no standard sizing across retailers and that some online returns are due to items being the wrong size. The word 'try' demonstrates the expectation of return. The current concept treats the customers home like a changing room in a shop. This concept has simply been carried over to the digital world. A change of concept would be 'how to reduce the chance of a mismatch'. Perhaps retailers could offer a discount to customers who upload their body measurements or who have

purchased and kept items of the same size previously. These details could be stored in a database referenced when the customer makes online purchases. The database could check for mismatches due to non-standard sizing before the customer completes the purchase. Variations of this concept are 'reducing the chance that the item will be returned', and 'rewards based on purchasing history'. Retailers could offer different levels of discount based on whether customers retain or return items frequently. This would help retailers reduce the chances of people buying items, wearing them once with the label still attached and then returning them. (Element I: 'People Cheat'). Retailers may then choose not to continue selling to people who frequently return items. Or, they may at least have conversations with customers who frequently return items to determine why.

One concept behind the loop JFE is competition for sales via free returns policies even though this leads to high wastage and lower margins. Here, there is a lock in effect. The retailer is trapped into offering free returns due to the fear that prospective customers will turn to their competitors if they do not.

Interestingly, Amazon offers a Wardrobe service for Amazon Prime customers. These customers pay for membership. This method

allows customers to select a variety of clothes to try at home. Amazon provide a prepaid return package in anticipation that the customer will return some items. The purchasing transaction occurs several days later or when the customer decides which items to keep. In some ways, this still uses the concept of optimising returns. However, it is different because customers pay to be a member, the customer is known, and their purchase history can create better matches in the future.

There is a branch in the flowscape that is not part of the dominating idea or loop. It is the consequence of returns for the retailer. These include long delays, costs and time spent checking returns for quality issues. Some retailers also offer discounts on returned items that are now 'nearly new'. A key assumption that could be challenged is 'the sale of new items'. What if a retailer charged a daily rental fee for the time the item was with the customer? If the customer rented the item for longer than a certain period, then the customer would own the item. They could then sell it back to the retailer in the future. Returned items could be cleaned and repaired if necessary and resold to other customers. These items could be sold as 'preloved' clothing. Recycling is popular as society comes to terms with climate change. Clothing materials and designs could be chosen for their recyclability. Compared to traditional retail, however, this sounds like a weak idea. Yet, if the consequences of returns are taken into consideration, online clothing retail is already a business with low prices, high handling costs and high distribution costs. The \$100bn of waste clearly indicates that some rethinking is required.

Your flowscapes

1. Decide on the topic you want to think about.
2. Write down a stream of consciousness as a list.
3. Label each item with a letter.
4. Indicate the flow to another item by adding the relevant letter at the end.
5. Plot out the letters in an open space and connect each letter as indicated in the previous step. The most connected letters should go near the centre.
6. Redraw the flowscape so that no lines cross over each other.
7. How does the flowscape help you understand your perception? What dominates your thinking?
8. How might you change your thinking? Focus your attention on a loop or collector and ask yourself what the concept is. Are there other ways to achieve this concept? Are there other concepts you should include?

Flowscape templates

This section contains a template for applying the flowscape technique to situations you wish to consider.

There is space for ten items on your stream of consciousness list. However, it is not necessary to have as many as ten items.

Flowscape 1
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 1

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 2
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 2

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 3
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 3

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 4
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 4

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 5
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 5

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 6
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 6

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

Flowscape 7
Topic:

A	>>
B	>>
C	>>
D	>>
E	>>
F	>>
G	>>
H	>>
I	>>
J	>>

Draw Flowscape 7

Dominant idea or loop:

Concepts:

New possibilities:

References

Dr Edward de Bono has written over 60 books on thinking as a skill. More details can be found at

<https://www.debono.com/books>

Water Logic

Viking; First Edition (26 Aug. 1993)

ISBN-10: 0670851256

The mechanism of mind

Publisher: Vermilion (2 Jul. 2015)

ISBN-10: 9781785040085

I am right, you are wrong

Publisher: Penguin (1 Sept. 2016)

ISBN-10: 0241257514

Serious creativity

Publisher: Vermilion; (5 Mar. 2015)

ISBN-10: 0091939704

de Bono

Dr. Edward de Bono, the originator of the term Lateral Thinking, dedicated his life to inspiring, encouraging, and enabling us to be better and more creative thinkers. He created The Six Thinking Hats® method to enable individuals and teams to be more receptive to new ideas and to develop them constructively.

The de Bono methods are a means of breaking old patterns and creating new ones. We don't tell you what to think but we show you how to think for yourself, both creatively and inclusively.

de Bono is the organisation established to develop, promote, licence, and protect the work of Dr. Edward de Bono in teaching thinking as a skill.

The de Bono methods are available to learn about in [books](#), in a free program for [schools and families](#), and via our [training](#) partners for use in organisations as a practical way to improve collaboration, communication, and creativity.

<https://www.debono.com/>